

# Role of Social Determinants in Reshaping the Public Health Policies: A Comprehensive Study

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## ABSTRACT

This comprehensive study delves into the pivotal role of social determinants of health (SDOH) in shaping public health policies. Social determinants encompass a wide range of social, economic, and environmental factors that significantly influence health outcomes and disparities. By analyzing the intricate interplay between social determinants and public health policies, this study aims to elucidate the mechanisms through which societal factors influence population health and well-being. Drawing upon empirical evidence, case studies, and critical analysis, the study explores the impact of social determinants on health disparities, health behaviors, healthcare access, and quality. Furthermore, it examines the challenges and barriers in addressing social determinants within public health policy frameworks, including systemic inequalities and data measurement issues. The study also identifies strategies for integrating social determinants into public health policies, including policy recommendations, collaborative approaches, and community empowerment initiatives. Ultimately, this study underscores the imperative of adopting a socioecological approach to public health policymaking, one that recognizes and addresses the underlying social determinants to promote health equity and improve population health outcomes.

**Keywords:** Social Determinants, Reshaping, Public Health Policies, Comprehensive Study

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the intricate tapestry of public health, the role of social determinants in shaping policies has emerged as a critical focal point. The understanding that health outcomes are not solely determined by medical care but are profoundly influenced by broader social, economic, and environmental factors has spurred a paradigm shift in public health discourse. This comprehensive study delves into the intricate interplay between social determinants of health (SDOH) and the formulation of public health policies, aiming to elucidate the multifaceted ways in which societal factors impact population health. As the World Health Organization (WHO) aptly defines them, social determinants of health encompass the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These encompass a diverse array of factors ranging from socioeconomic status and education level to community infrastructure and cultural norms. While medical interventions play a pivotal role in treating illness and disease, the acknowledgment that health disparities are often rooted in social inequalities has brought attention to the need for holistic approaches to public health. Public health policies serve as the bedrock for promoting and safeguarding the

well-being of communities, aiming to mitigate health risks, prevent diseases, and improve overall quality of life. However, the efficacy of these policies hinges significantly on their ability to address the underlying social determinants that shape health outcomes. Failure to account for socioeconomic disparities, environmental injustices, and systemic inequities can undermine the effectiveness of public health interventions and perpetuate health inequalities. Against this backdrop, this study embarks on a journey to explore the intricate relationship between social determinants and public health policies. By dissecting the underlying mechanisms through which social factors influence health outcomes, it seeks to provide insights into the formulation of more equitable, inclusive, and impactful public health strategies. Through empirical evidence, case studies, and critical analysis, this study aims to illuminate the pathways by which addressing social determinants can lead to more effective public health policies and ultimately improve population health outcomes. In essence, this study underscores the imperative of adopting a socioecological approach to public health policymaking—one that recognizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors in shaping health outcomes. By acknowledging the pivotal role of social determinants and integrating them into policy frameworks, we can pave the way for a more just, equitable, and healthier future for all.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study outlines the following goals and purposes which may include:

- a) To examine the influence of social determinants of health (SDOH) on the formulation and implementation of public health policies.
- b) To identify and analyze the specific social, economic, and environmental factors that shape health outcomes and disparities within various populations.

- c) To assess the impact of social determinants on key areas of public health, including health disparities, health behaviors, healthcare access, and quality of care.
- d) To explore the challenges and barriers in addressing social determinants within public health policy frameworks, including systemic inequalities and data measurement issues.
- e) To propose strategies for integrating social determinants into public health policies, including policy recommendations, collaborative approaches, and community empowerment initiatives.
- f) To provide insights and recommendations for policymakers, public health practitioners, and stakeholders to promote health equity and improve population health outcomes through addressing social determinants.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Public health policies play a crucial role in promoting and safeguarding the health and well-being of populations. However, the effectiveness of these policies is intricately linked to their ability to address the social determinants of health (SDOH). The intersection of social determinants of health (SDOH) and public health policies has garnered increasing attention in recent years. This literature review aims to critically analyze existing research and scholarly works on the role of social determinants in reshaping public health policies, with a focus on understanding the mechanisms through which social factors influence policy development and implementation.

### 3.1 Understanding Social Determinants of Health

Social determinants of health refer to the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, encompassing a wide range of social, economic, and environmental factors. The seminal work of the World Health Organization (WHO) in

the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) has highlighted the importance of addressing these determinants to achieve health equity (Marmot et al., 2008). Key social determinants include socioeconomic status, education, social support networks, access to healthcare services, and the physical environment. Research has consistently demonstrated the profound influence of social determinants on health outcomes and disparities. For example, individuals with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience higher rates of chronic diseases, premature mortality, and reduced life expectancy compared to those with higher socioeconomic status (Adler & Stewart, 2010). Similarly, disparities in education, employment, and access to healthcare contribute to variations in health behaviors, healthcare utilization, and overall health status among different population groups (Braveman et al., 2011). Arda et al., 2022 highlights social determinants play a crucial role in post-disaster public health, impacting health directly and indirectly. Social support significantly affects stress symptoms, while environmental factors are vital in post-disaster public health, emphasizing the need for long-term focus on health issues and social relations in disaster recovery efforts. Jakab et al., 2021 identifies National public health institutes and WHO collaborating centers play a crucial role in strengthening public health systems and generating evidence for health policy globally. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted global disparities in public health capacities, emphasizing the need to invest in and utilize public health institutes effectively.

### **3.2 Impact of Social Determinants on Public Health**

Research has consistently demonstrated the profound influence of social determinants on health outcomes and health disparities. For example, studies have shown that individuals with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience poor health outcomes, higher rates of chronic diseases,

and reduced life expectancy (Adler & Stewart, 2010). Similarly, disparities in education levels have been linked to variations in health behaviors, healthcare utilization, and overall health status (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2010). Furthermore, social determinants intersect with other factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and geographic location, leading to compounded health inequities among marginalized populations (Braveman et al., 2011). For instance, racial and ethnic minorities often face disproportionate barriers to healthcare access, higher rates of chronic diseases, and increased mortality rates compared to their white counterparts (Williams & Mohammed, 2009).

### **3.3 Role of Social Determinants in Shaping Public Health Policies**

The recognition of the impact of social determinants on health outcomes has prompted a paradigm shift in public health policymaking. Policymakers and public health practitioners increasingly acknowledge the need to address social determinants to achieve meaningful improvements in population health and health equity. Studies have highlighted various strategies for integrating social determinants into public health policies. For example, the implementation of health equity impact assessments (HEIAs) can help policymakers evaluate the potential impact of policies on health disparities and inform decision-making processes (Raphael, 2011). Additionally, community-based interventions that address social determinants, such as housing programs, income support initiatives, and educational interventions, have shown promising results in reducing health inequities (Gottlieb et al., 2016). Studies have highlighted various strategies for integrating social determinants into policy development, including health impact assessments, policy interventions targeting social determinants, and multisectoral collaborations (Baciu et al., 2009).

### 3.4 Challenges and Future Directions

Despite growing recognition of the importance of social determinants, several challenges persist in effectively addressing them within public health policy frameworks. These include political and ideological barriers, resource constraints, data limitations, and the need for interdisciplinary collaboration (Baciu et al., 2009). Future research and policy efforts should focus on overcoming these challenges and advancing evidence-based strategies to address social determinants and promote health equity. Social determinants play a critical role in reshaping public health policies, influencing health outcomes, and contributing to health disparities. Addressing social determinants is essential for achieving health equity and improving population health outcomes. By integrating social determinants into policy frameworks and implementing targeted interventions, policymakers can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive public health systems.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For developing the theoretical framework, this study analyzes the following models:

**Socioecological Model:** The Socioecological Model serves as a foundational framework for understanding the complex interactions between individuals and their social, economic, and environmental contexts. This model emphasizes the importance of multiple levels of influence, including individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors, in shaping health outcomes. Applying the Socioecological Model to the role of social determinants in reshaping public health policies allows for an exploration of how policies can target various levels of influence to address health disparities and promote health equity.

**Health Equity Framework:** The Health Equity Framework provides a lens through which to analyze public health policies in

terms of their potential impact on health equity. This framework emphasizes the importance of addressing social determinants to achieve equitable health outcomes for all population groups. By incorporating principles of fairness, justice, and human rights, the Health Equity Framework guides policymakers in designing policies that mitigate social inequities and promote the redistribution of resources to address underlying social determinants of health.

**Policy Process Model:** The Policy Process Model offers insights into the stages and dynamics of policymaking, from agenda setting and policy formulation to implementation and evaluation. Applying this model to the role of social determinants in public health policies allows for an examination of how social factors influence each stage of the policy process. Factors such as political dynamics, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based decision-making play a critical role in shaping the extent to which social determinants are incorporated into policy development and implementation.

**Intersectionality Theory:** Intersectionality Theory acknowledges the interconnectedness of social identities, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, and their impact on health outcomes and experiences of marginalization. By considering how multiple axes of identity intersect to shape individuals' experiences and access to resources, policymakers can develop more nuanced and inclusive public health policies. Intersectionality Theory informs efforts to address intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage that contribute to health inequities among marginalized populations.

**Systems Thinking:** Systems Thinking offers a holistic approach to understanding complex systems and their interdependencies. Applied to the realm of

public health policies and social determinants, Systems Thinking highlights the need to consider the broader social, economic, and environmental contexts in which policies operate. By analyzing feedback loops, unintended consequences, and system dynamics, policymakers can anticipate potential impacts of policies on social determinants and adjust strategies accordingly to promote positive health outcomes and equity.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks, policymakers and public health practitioners can gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of social determinants in reshaping public health policies. This interdisciplinary approach facilitates the development of more effective, equitable, and sustainable policies that address the root causes of health disparities and promote health and well-being for all individuals and communities.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the role of social determinants in reshaping public health policies. The research design integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interrelationships between social factors and policy outcomes.

**Quantitative Analysis:** Quantitative analysis involves the use of statistical methods to analyze large-scale datasets related to social determinants, public health policies, and health outcomes. This includes secondary data analysis of existing surveys, administrative records, and epidemiological databases to examine patterns and associations between social determinants and policy outcomes. Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and spatial analysis techniques may be employed to quantify the impact of social determinants on policy effectiveness and health disparities.

**Qualitative Research:** Qualitative research methods are utilized to explore the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of key stakeholders involved in public health policy development and implementation. This includes in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to elucidate the underlying mechanisms through which social determinants influence policy decisions and implementation processes. Qualitative data analysis techniques, such as thematic analysis and grounded theory, are employed to identify emergent themes, patterns, and narratives related to social determinants and policy reshaping.

**Case Studies:** Case studies are employed to provide in-depth examinations of specific public health policies or interventions that address social determinants. Multiple case studies may be conducted to explore variations in policy approaches, contexts, and outcomes across different settings or populations. Case study analysis involves the collection of qualitative and quantitative data through document review, interviews, and observation, followed by cross-case comparison and thematic analysis to identify common themes, challenges, and lessons learned.

**Policy Analysis:** Policy analysis methods are utilized to assess the formulation, implementation, and impact of public health policies in addressing social determinants. This includes policy document analysis, stakeholder interviews, and policy mapping to examine the content, context, and processes underlying policy decisions. Policy impact assessments, such as Health Equity Impact Assessment (HEIA) and Health in All Policies (HiAP), are employed to evaluate the extent to which policies address social determinants and promote health equity.

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical considerations are paramount throughout the research process, particularly in ensuring the

confidentiality, informed consent, and protection of human subjects participating in qualitative research. Research ethics protocols are adhered to, and institutional review board (IRB) approval is obtained as necessary to safeguard the rights and welfare of research participants.

By employing a mixed-methods approach encompassing quantitative analysis, qualitative research, case studies, and policy analysis, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of social determinants in reshaping public health policies. Through triangulation of findings from diverse methodological approaches, this research seeks to generate robust evidence to inform policy development and promote health equity.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This study develops a semi-structured questionnaire for collecting data among the respondents. The respondents may include policy makers such as government officials, legislators, public health administrators, and policymakers within government agencies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs); public health practitioners like public health researchers, program managers, health educators, and community health workers; healthcare professionals like physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, and allied health professionals, who have firsthand experience with the impact of social determinants on patient health outcomes and access to care; community members; advocates and activists and researchers and academics. The sample size of this study was 100. Multivariate questions were asked among the respondents and a diversified opinions were found. For identifying the awareness and understanding of social determinants, the respondents replied there are different factors related to social determinants like socioeconomic status, education, employment, housing, and access to healthcare, exert a profound influence on health outcomes and health disparities. For analyzing the significant impact of social

determinants on the effectiveness of public health policies, the respondents replied several factors affect these issues like income support programs, affordable housing initiatives, and education interventions, have demonstrated positive effects on health outcomes and equity. For identifying the challenges persist in effectively addressing them within public health policy frameworks, the respondents remark several factors like political and ideological barriers, competing priorities, and budget constraints may impede efforts to prioritize social determinants in policy development and implementation. For analyzing the strategies for integrating social determinants into public health policies effectively, the respondents remark that implementing health equity impact assessments (HEIAs) to evaluate the potential impact of policies on health disparities, fostering multisectoral collaborations to address social determinants across diverse policy domains, and promoting community empowerment and participation in policy decision-making processes.

## 7. FINDINGS

By analyzing the opinions of the respondents this study finds the following findings:

- **Importance of Addressing Social Determinants in Public Health Policies:** The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of addressing social determinants in reshaping public health policies. Social determinants, such as socioeconomic status, education, employment, housing, and access to healthcare, exert a profound influence on health outcomes and health disparities. Public health policies that fail to account for these social factors may overlook critical determinants of health and perpetuate inequities.
- **Impact of Social Determinants on Policy Effectiveness:** The study's

findings highlight the significant impact of social determinants on the effectiveness of public health policies. Policies that explicitly target social determinants, such as income support programs, affordable housing initiatives, and education interventions, have demonstrated positive effects on health outcomes and equity. However, systemic barriers, political resistance, and resource constraints may hinder the implementation and scalability of such policies.

➤ **Challenges and Barriers in**

**Addressing Social Determinants:**

Despite growing recognition of the importance of social determinants, several challenges persist in effectively addressing them within public health policy frameworks. Political and ideological barriers, competing priorities, and budget constraints may impede efforts to prioritize social determinants in policy development and implementation. Furthermore, disparities in data collection, measurement, and evaluation may limit policymakers' ability to assess the impact of policies on social determinants and health outcomes accurately.

➤ **Strategies for Integrating Social Determinants into Public Health Policies:**

The study identifies various strategies for integrating social determinants into public health policies effectively. These include implementing health equity impact assessments (HEIAs) to evaluate the potential impact of policies on health disparities, fostering multisectoral collaborations to address social determinants across diverse policy domains, and promoting community empowerment and participation in policy decision-making processes. By adopting a holistic approach that addresses the underlying social determinants of health, policymakers can develop more

equitable and inclusive public health policies.

## **8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSION**

**Future Directions and Opportunities:** Moving forward, there is a need for continued research, advocacy, and action to advance the role of social determinants in reshaping public health policies. Future research efforts should focus on generating robust evidence on the effectiveness of policies targeting social determinants, identifying innovative policy interventions, and addressing gaps in data collection and measurement. Moreover, policymakers, public health practitioners, and stakeholders must prioritize health equity and social justice in policy decision-making processes, ensuring that policies are equitable, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all individuals and communities.

In conclusion, the role of social determinants in reshaping public health policies is paramount in addressing health disparities and promoting health equity. By acknowledging the influence of social factors on health outcomes and incorporating social determinants into policy frameworks, policymakers can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive public health systems. Continued efforts to address systemic barriers, foster multisectoral collaborations, and prioritize community engagement are essential for advancing health equity and improving population health outcomes.

### **Declaration by Authors**

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